

23rd October

Vajiram and Ravi

No Indian Has the Right to Marry

Context

- The Supreme Court recently issued its much-anticipated decision **rejecting requests to legalise same-sex unions and went into greater detail about the Special Marriage Act of 1954's provisions.**
- All five judges have chosen **to leave it to the legislature to enact such a law.** Court's refusal to grant legal recognition to marriages between persons of the same sex is a **huge legal setback to the queer community in the country.**

The Petition Before the Supreme Court Regarding Same Sex Marriage

- The petitioners had **requested the Court to reimagine the contours of the Special Marriage Act (SMA) 1954** to embrace same-sex unions.
- The petitioners had requested **to declare SMA unconstitutional on the ground that it downgrades the diverse LGBTQIA+ community to the margins.**

Special Marriage Act 1954 and its Salient Features

- **The SMA 1954**
 - The Act **governs a civil marriage** where the state sanctions the marriage rather than the religion.
 - Issues of personal law such as marriage, divorce, adoption are governed by religious laws that are codified.
 - These laws, such as the **Muslim Marriage Act, 1954**, and the **Hindu Marriage Act, 1955**, require either spouse to convert to the religion of the other before marriage.
 - In the Indian system, **both civil and religious marriages are recognised.** However, **the SMA enables marriage between inter-faith or inter-caste couples without them giving up their religious identity or resorting to conversion.**
- **Key Features of SMA 1954**
 - The applicability of the Act **extends to the people of all faiths**, including Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists, across India.
 - The minimum age to get married under the SMA is 21 years for males and 18 years for females.
 - However, once married as per the secular law, under Section 19 of the Act, **any member of an undivided family who professes the Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, or Jain religion shall be deemed to affect their severance from the family.**
 - **This would affect rights, including the right to inheritance, of the persons choosing to marry under the SMA.**

The Verdict and Observations Made by the SC

- **Out of Court's Jurisdiction**
 - The Court **firmly expressed its reluctance to engage with any innovative and creative interpretative exercise.**
 - Also, the court **cited the limits of its jurisdiction** and emphasised the exclusive legislative authority over such matters.
 - **The top court said it is for Parliament & state legislature to formulate laws on it.**
- **Refused to Declare SMA, 1954 Unconstitutional**

- The Court emphasised the SMA is inherently secular and progressive nature and rejected to declare it unconstitutional.
- The court **underscored the potential regression that might transpire if such a measure were adopted.**
- CJI D.Y. Chandrachud and Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul ruled that **queer couples have a right to seek recognition for their union**, but **declined to read down the provisions of the SMA to that effect.**
- On the other hand, Justices S. Ravindra Bhat, Hima Kohli and P.S. Narasimha **rejected the position holding that any such recognition can only be based on statute.**
- **Marriage is Not a Fundamental Right Under the Constitution:**
Despite dissenting opinions articulated by the CJI and Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul, **the bench was unequivocal in asserting that there is no fundamental right to marriage under the Indian Constitution.**

Criticisms of the SC Verdict on Same Sex Marriage

- **Majoritarian Morality Influenced the Judgement**
 - The decision appears to have been influenced **by the majoritarian morality rather than often repeated "constitutional morality."**
 - The judgment would certainly become **a classic case of judicial restraint** and any government would justifiably celebrate.
- **Restricts the Scope of Puttaswamy Judgement (2017)**
 - The Court has even **restricted the scope of the nine-judge bench in Puttaswamy (2017) by holding that it merely upheld the right to privacy but not to marry.**
 - The privacy judgment upheld decisional privacy or privacy of choice, which should ideally include the choice of entering a matrimonial relationship.
- **Contrary Views by the CJI**
 - The CJI declined to interpret the SMA **to include same-sex couples within its ambit.** However, **this position seems problematic** given the interpretation in Article 15(1) of the term sex to include sexual interpretation.
 - The CJI quoted Shafin Jahan (2018) case but **reached a contrary conclusion.**
 - **In Shafin Jahan case**, the Court accepted that **our choices are respected because they are ours.**
 - **Social approval for intimate personal decisions is not the basis** for recognising them. Indeed, the Constitution protects personal liberty from disapproving audiences.
- **The Reluctance of the Bench to Interpret SMA, 1954**
 - **The weakest aspect of the verdict** which was consistent in both the minority and majority opinions was **the reluctance to engage in an interpretative analysis of SMA due to apprehensions about encroaching on legislative prerogative.**
 - However, **such interpretation has not been an unfamiliar terrain** for the constitutional courts.
 - Previous cases have witnessed the judiciary instilling diverse terms with distinct meanings, **thereby extending the reach of statutes, and amplifying the expanse of rights safeguarded under the Constitution.**
 - **For instance, in NALSA (2014)**, the word sex was interpreted to give it a wider meaning: The expression 'sex' used in Articles 15 and 16 is not just limited to the biological sex of male or female, but intended to include

people who consider themselves to be neither male or female”.

- **Moreover, various rights**, including the right to self-determination of gender, right to information, rights to privacy, etc which are considered inherent to Article 21, **were not explicitly mentioned in the text of Constitution.**
- **The judiciary’s liberal interpretation of the right to life and liberty led to the recognition of these valuable rights.**

Conclusion

- In concluding that there is no fundamental right to marry, **the Court has negated the expectation that it would not allow discrimination against same-sex couples** in the marital domain to continue.
- The LGBTQIA+ community **may now have to take hope from the Court’s direction that the government should form a committee to decide the rights and entitlements of queer couples.** [Editorial Analysis](#)

Dollar–Rupee Swap: After Forex Swap Maturity, Banks Ready to Return \$5 Billion to RBI

Why in News?

- With a \$5 billion forex swap between the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and banks set to mature, a majority of lenders have arranged for dollars to be delivered to the RBI.
- In April last year, the RBI conducted a dollar/rupee (USD/INR) sell-buy swap auction for an amount of \$ 5 billion, with an agreement to buy back those dollars at maturity, which is October 23.

What’s in Today’s Article?

- What is a Dollar–Rupee Swap Auction?
- Why do Central Banks Engage in it?
- What is the RBI’s Intent and Impact of Dollar-Rupee Swap Auction?
- News Summary Regarding RBI’s Forex Swap

What is a Dollar–Rupee Swap Auction?

- **It’s a forex tool** whereby the central bank uses its currency to buy another currency or vice versa.
- **In a Dollar-Rupee buy/sell swap**, the central bank buys dollars (US dollars or USD) from banks in exchange for Indian Rupees (INR) and immediately gets into an opposite deal with banks promising to sell dollars at a later date.

Why do Central Banks Engage in it?

- **Surplus liquidity** in the system was pegged at Rs 7.5 lakh crore, which needs to be curbed to keep a tab on inflation.
 - Usually, the central bank will resort to **traditional tools** such as increasing the repo rate or increasing the cash reserve ratio (CRR), but this can have a negative implication on the economy.
 - Therefore, the RBI used a different toolkit - **variable rate reverse repo auction (VRRR)** last year.
 - However, the recent VRRR auctions were undersubscribed by banks, as the cash market offered instant and better yields.

- This forced the RBI to consider a **longer-term liquidity adjustment tool such as forex auctions.**

- Forex swaps help in **liquidity management** and (in a limited way) helps in keeping the currency rates in check.
- **A dollar-rupee buy/sell swap injects INR** into the banking system while sucking out the dollars, and the reverse happens in a sell/buy swap.

What is the RBI’s Intent and Impact of Dollar-Rupee Swap Auction?

- The intent here is that the central bank acquires dollars from the seller, charging the lowest premium possible for the tenor.
- **As the forex swaps are intended for liquidity management**, their impact on currency is only incidental.
- **Amidst global tension and hardening crude oil prices**, it’s important to keep INR under control. The RBI resorting to selling USD **will keep a check on Rupee’s volatility and help curb its depreciation to some extent.**
- **For the bond market**, the exercise may have a pronounced impact. This tool leaves room for the central bank to buy bonds when needed. Consequently, the strategy will contain bond yields.
- **Will the government gain from the swaps?** Usually, RBI makes its dividend payment to the government for the previous fiscal. The surplus from these swaps could be used to supplement the payouts.

News Summary Regarding RBI’s Forex Swap:

- **The RBI had announced the forex swap** last year to elongate the maturity profile of forward book and smoothen the receivables relating to forward assets.
- This also supported the rupee which came under pressure due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict.
 - In the immediate aftermath of the war, global commodity prices increased led by oil, and global financial markets too saw heightened volatility.
 - A flight to safety occurred, putting pressure on emerging market currencies such as India.
- Hence, while the announcement for the auction was said to be to adjust the maturity profile of RBI’s forward book, **it also had an impact on the exchange rate.**
- With the maturity of the swap approaching this week, it is almost ironic that the world has once again found itself in the midst of another unforeseen crisis in the form of the Israel-Hamas war. [Economics](#)

Lemru Elephant reserve

The Union Coal Ministry has said that Coal India Limited’s (CIL) 40 coal blocks in and around the Lemru Elephant Corridor (LEC) will not be auctioned at the request of the Chhattisgarh government.

About Lemru Elephant reserve

- It is located in the **Korba district of Chhattisgarh.**
- It seeks to give **elephants a permanent habitat** while also minimising property damage and human-animal conflict.
- The reserve is part of an elephant corridor that connects Lemru (Korba), Badalkhol (Jashpur), Tamorpingla (Surguja).
- **Elephant reserves in India-** There are **33 notified Elephant Reserves (ERs)** in the country, **spread over 14 states.**

What is Project Elephant?

- It was launched by the Government of India in 1992 as a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** with following objectives:
 - To protect elephants, their habitat & corridors
 - To address issues of man-animal conflict

- Welfare of captive elephants
- Through the Project (being mainly implemented in 16 states, or UTs), the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, provides financial and technical support to major elephant range states in the country.

Source **ht:** [Chhattisgarh: 40 coal blocks in Lemru reserve not to be mined, says Coal ministry](#). [Environment](#)

Leniency plus’ norms

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) has released a draft of revised lesser penalty regulations that provides for introduction of a “leniency plus” programme

About leniency plus’ norms

- It is a new **cartel detecting tool** and sheds light on how the competition watchdog intends to operationalize it.
- The “Leniency Plus” regime was **part of the Competition (Amendment) Act 2023**
- Leniency Plus is a **proactive antitrust enforcement strategy** aimed at attracting leniency applications by encouraging companies already under investigation for one cartel to report other cartels unknown to the competition regulator.
- The benefit that would entail such disclosure is a **reduction of penalty** in the first cartel to the person disclosing the information, without prejudice to the company obtaining lesser penalty regarding the newly disclosed cartel.
- This “leniency plus” regime is **already recognised in** jurisdictions like the **UK, US, Singapore, and Brazil**.

Key facts about Competition Commission of India

- It is a **statutory body** of the Government of India, was established in March 2009 under **the Competition Act, 2002**.
- The goal of CCI is to create and sustain fair competition in the economy that will provide a **‘level playing field’ to the producers** and make the markets work for the welfare of consumers.
- The priority of the Commission is to eliminate practices having adverse effects on competition, promote and sustain competition, protect the interests of consumers, and ensure freedom of trade in the markets of India.
- Mandate:** To implement provisions of The Competition Act, 2002, which—
 - prohibits anti-competitive agreements and abuse of dominant position by enterprises;
 - regulates mergers and acquisitions (M&A), which can have an adverse effect on competition within India. Thus, deals beyond a certain threshold are required to get clearance from CCI.
- Composition:**
 - It has the **composition of a quasi-judicial body**, with one chairperson and six additional members.
 - All members of the CCI are **appointed by the Central Government**.
- Headquarters:** New Delhi.

What is Cartelisation?

- Cartels, which involve a group of **businesses colluding to keep prices high**, have been viewed by economists as a significant threat to the market economy.
- When businesses cooperate with each other rather than compete against each other, there could be many adverse consequences for consumers.

Source **:th business line** [CCI issues draft of ‘leniency plus’ norms to curb cartelization](#). [Economy](#)

Infantile Hypophosphatasia

Recently, a family of children diagnosed with the rarest of rconditionsare diseases — Infantile Hypophosphatasia struggling to get these genetic disorders included under the Centre’s National Policy for Rare Diseases (NPRD).

About Infantile Hypophosphatasia:

- It is a **rare genetic disease** in which the patient’s bones and teeth demineralise, making her fragile and prone to fractures.
- Symptom**
 - It may **have no noticeable abnormalities at birth**, but complications become apparent within the first six months of life.
 - The initial problem may be the baby’s **failure to gain weight and grow** as expected, referred to as “failure to thrive.”
 - Sometimes the skull bones fuse, called craniosynostosis, which can lead to a deformed head (brachycephaly).
 - Affected infants have softened, weakened, and deformed bones consistent with rickets.
 - Rickets is a general term for complications** due to defective skeletal mineralization during growth with softening of bone and characteristic bowing deformities.
- Cause**
 - It is caused by **mutations in the ALPL gene**.
 - This is the only gene that causes HPP. Genes provide instructions for making proteins that have an important function in the body.
 - When a mutation occurs, the protein may be faulty, inefficient, or absent, as in HPP.
- There is **no known cure for this disease**.

Source **:th Families of India’s first cases of two rare disease patients struggle for inclusion under national policy** [Health](#)

Little Ice Age (LIA)

A recent study showed the signature of moist conditions during the Little Ice Age (LIA) from the Western Ghats, India.

About the Little Ice Age (LIA):

- It was one of the coldest periods of the past 10,000 years, a period of cooling that was particularly pronounced in the North Atlantic region.
- This cold spell, whose precise timeline scholars debate but which seems to have set in around 600 years ago, was responsible for crop failures, famines, and pandemics throughout Europe, resulting in misery and death for millions.
- The Little Ice Age followed the Mediaeval Warming Period (roughly 900–1300 CE) and preceded the present period of warming that began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
- Impact on climate:**
 - It is best known for its **effects in Europe and the North Atlantic region**.
 - Alpine glaciers advanced far below** their previous (and present) limits, obliterating farms, churches, and villages in Switzerland, France, and elsewhere.
 - Frequent cold winters and cool, wet summers **led to crop failures and famines** over much of northern and central Europe. In addition, the North Atlantic cod fisheries declined as ocean temperatures fell in the 17th century.

Key findings of the study

- It showed significant **variations in rainfall patterns** during that age, challenging the **conventional notion of a uniformly cold and dry climate** with reduced monsoon rainfall during the LIA.
- It suggested that northward movement of the Inter Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ), positive temperature anomalies, increased sunspot numbers, and high solar activity could be **driving climate change and increased South West Monsoon**.
- They attributed the weakest phase of the Indian Summer Monsoon (ISM) across the Indian subcontinent during the LIA, in general, to the southward shift of the ITCZ, resulting from increased northward energy flux across the equator during a cold northern hemisphere.
- The high-resolution palaeoclimatic records generated in the present study could be helpful in developing paleoclimatic models for future climatic predictions and also for scientifically sound policy planning.
- Knowledge and understanding of climate change and Indian Summer Monsoon (ISM) variability during **the Holocene** could be of immense interest to strengthen the understanding of the present ISM-influenced climatic conditions, as well as of possible future climatic trends and projections.

Source [dst.gov.in](#): [Little Ice Age \(LIA\) was wet \(moist\) and was not uniformly cold and dry](#) **Geography**

Operation Chakra II

India's Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has launched **Operation Chakra-II**, a crackdown on transnational organised cyber-enabled financial crimes.

About Operation Chakra-II:

- It was launched to fight against transnationally **organised cyber-enabled financial crimes** in India.
- For this, CBI has **partnered with Microsoft and Amazon**, as well as with national and international agencies, to combat and dismantle infrastructure of illegal call centres.
- The CBI is working with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) of the USA, the Cyber Crime Directorate and IFCACC of INTERPOL, the National Crime Agency (NCA) in the UK, Singapore Police Force and BKA of Germany to notify further leads.

Key facts about the CBI

- The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is the **premier investigative agency of India**.
- The agency was established in 1963 by the Indian government as a result of the recommendation of the **Santhanam Committee**.
- CBI is not a statutory body. It derives its power to investigate from the **Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946**.
- **Control**
 - It operates under the jurisdiction of **the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions** (which in turn operated under PMO).
 - However, for investigation of offences under the Prevention of Corruption Act, CBI vests superintendence to the Central Vigilance Commission.
- **Functions**
 - Initially, it was set up to **investigate corruption in government departments** and public sector undertakings.
 - However, over the years, its jurisdiction has expanded to cover a wide range of cases, **including economic offenses, cyber-crimes**, organized crimes, and special crimes.

Source :[toi](#) [CBI launches Operation Chakra-II: What it is and why Microsoft and Amazon are part of this](#) **Defence & Security**

What is Optoelectronics?

A new **Laboratory of Advance Synthesis and Characterisation (LASC)** in Gujarat is developing LASC probe stations for universities in India and abroad for the investigation of opto-electronic properties in a wide range of materials.

About Optoelectronics:

- Optoelectronics is the **study and application of light-emitting or light-detecting devices**.
- It is widely considered a **sub-discipline of photonics**. **Photonics refers to the study and application of the physical science of light**.
- **Optoelectronics** is a fast-emerging technology field that consists of **applying electronic devices to sourcing, detection, and control of light**.
- It is **largely based on semiconductor materials**. These **exhibit suitable bandgap energies for absorbing** near-infrared and visible **light, and their electric conductivity** (albeit not perfect) **is also essential** for such applications.
- **Examples of optoelectronic devices** consist of:
 - Telecommunication **laser**
 - **Optical fibre**
 - Blue laser
 - **LED** traffic lights
 - **Photodiodes**
 - **Solar cells**
- These devices are used in a wide **variety of application areas**, such as military services, **automatic access control systems, telecommunications**, medical equipment, and more.
- Optoelectronics **should not be confused with electro-optics**, as **this field is a wider branch of physics that deals with the interaction of electric fields and light**, without concern if an electronic device is involved or not.

Source [pib](#) : [New Laboratory of Advanced Synthesis and Characterization develops probe stations for universities to probe opto-electronic properties in range of materials](#) **Science & Tech**

Bannerghatta National Park

The Supreme Court-appointed Central Empowered Committee (CEC) recently directed the office of the chief secretary of Karnataka to submit a response on the issue of encroachment of the eco-sensitive zone (ESZ) of Bannerghatta National Park.

About Bannerghatta National Park:

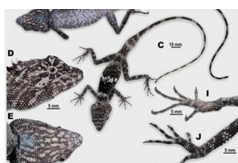
- **Location:** It is located near Bangalore, **Karnataka**, in the **hills of the Anekal range**.
- Founded in 1971, the park was given the **status of a national park in 1974**.
- **In 2002, a portion of the park became a biological reserve**, the **Bannerghatta Biological Park**. It is the **first biological park** in India to have a fenced, forested elephant sanctuary.
- **In 2006, India's first butterfly enclosure was inaugurated** at the park.
- **River: Suvarnamukhi stream**, the main source of water for the animals of the park, **runs through the centre** of the park.
- It also acts as an **important corridor for the elephants migrating from the Eastern Ghats to the Western Ghats**

- **Vegetation:** There are **three types** of vegetation that can be found: **Dry Deciduous Scrub Forests, Southern Tropical Dry Deciduous Forests and Southern Tropical Moist Mixed Forests.**
- **Flora:** Include **Narcissus latifolia, Schleicheria oleosa, Sandalwood, Neem, Tamarind, Bamboo, Eucalyptus** etc.
- **Fauna:** Prime habitat for several species, including the endangered Asian **Elephant, Indian gaur, Tiger, Sambar deer, Spotted deer, Leopard, Wild dog, Wild pig, Sloth bear, Common mongoose, Pangolin, Slender loris, Black-naped hare, etc.**

Source :ie [Bannerghatta National Park encroachment: Supreme Court committee seeks Karnataka govt's response](#) **Environment**

What is Laodracon carsticola

An international team of biologists, animal management specialists, geneticists and forestry managers has discovered a new species of "dragon lizard" in Laos—one with very impressive camouflage capabilities.



About Laodracon carsticola:

- It is a newly discovered **species of dragon lizard.**
- It has been discovered to live **only in the karstic massifs** of Khammouan Province, **central Laos.**
- It possesses extraordinary **camouflage abilities.**
- It **belongs to the mainland Asian subfamily Draconinae.** This subfamily contains around 256 species that all live across Asia.
- The **lizards within this family are typically omnivores**, with the species spread across **tree-living and ground-living habitats.**
- **Features:**
 - It measures around **101 millimetres (3.9 inches) long** and has **slate grey and black scales with blue coloration on their throats and blue/gray bellies.**
 - It can be told apart from other species by the **noticeably swollen base of the tail.**
 - The **body scales exhibit pronounced rough scales**, which could serve to **help it climb the steep limestone pinnacles** on which it lives.
 - The lizards are suspected to **have a diet of ants.**

Source :phys.org [New 'dragon lizard' species with impressive camouflage capabilities found in Southeast Asia](#) **Environment**

What is Montreux Convention

The Turkish Ministry of National Defence recently announced that it will impose restrictions on the passage of warships belonging to countries not bordering the Black Sea within the framework of the Montreux Convention.



About the Montreux Convention:

- It is an **agreement concerning the Dardanelles Strait and the Bosphorus Strait**, also known as the **Turkish straits** or the **Black Sea straits.**
- The Turkish straits are the **only maritime passage between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea.**
- **According to the 1936 Montreux Convention** Regarding the Regime of the Straits, often referred to simply as the Montreux Convention, **Turkey has control over the Turkish Straits.**
- **In the event of a war, the pact gives Turkey the right** to regulate the transit of naval warships and to **block the straits for warships belonging to the countries involved in the conflict.**
- **Merchant vessels enjoy freedom of passage** through the Turkish Straits, while passages of **vessels of war are subject to some restrictions** that vary **depending on whether these vessels belong to the Black Sea littoral States or not.**
- Besides some **general restrictions applicable to all, vessels of war belonging to non-littoral States are subject to specific restrictions**, such as those regarding maximum aggregate tonnage and duration of stay in the Black Sea.
- The principal **provisions of the Convention ruling the passage of vessels of war are:**
 - **Aircraft carriers**, whether belonging to the littoral States or not, **can in no way pass through the Turkish Straits.**
 - **Only submarines belonging to littoral States can pass** through the Turkish Straits for the purpose of **rejoining their base in the Black Sea for the first time after their construction or purchase, or for the purpose of repair in dockyards outside the Black Sea.**
 - The **total number and maximum aggregate tonnage of all foreign naval forces** which may be in the course of passage through the Turkish Straits **are limited to 9 and 15,000 tons respectively.**
 - The **maximum aggregate tonnage** which **non-littoral States** may have in the Black Sea **is 45,000 tons.**
 - In this regard, the **maximum aggregate tonnage of the vessels of war** that one **non-littoral State** may have in the Black Sea **is 30,000 tons.**
 - **Vessels of war belonging to non-littoral States cannot stay more than 21 days** in the Black Sea.
 - **Passages** through the Turkish Straits are notified to Türkiye through diplomatic channels **prior to intended passages.**
 - The **notification time is 8 days for vessels of war belonging to littoral States, and 15 days for those of non-littoral States.**
- **Article 19 of the Convention:**
 - **Vessels of war belonging to belligerent powers**, whether they are Black Sea Powers or not, **which have become separated from their bases, may return thereto.**
 - That means **warships can return to their original bases** through the passage, **and Turkey cannot prevent it.**
 - For example, a Russian fleet registered in the Black Sea but currently located in the Mediterranean Sea is allowed to pass through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits and return to its base.

Source :dailyhunt.me [Türkiye imposes restrictions on the passage of warships in its straits under the Montreux Convention](#) **International**

Tribal Cooperative Marketing

Development Federation (TRIFED)

The Union Tribal Affairs Ministry recently declared “null and void” the suspension of the managing director of TRIFED.

About Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation (TRIFED):

- It is a national-level **organisation under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs**, primarily **engaged in the development and marketing of tribal handicrafts and natural products**.
- **It came into existence in 1987** and got **registered under the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act, 1984** (now the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act, 2002).
- The **main mandate** of TRIFED is **capability enhancement** for Tribals, **promotion of tribal products**, and **creation of marketing opportunities** for the Tribals with a view to **ensuring remunerative prices** for their products and augmenting their income on a sustainable basis.
- **Objectives:**
 - To **develop the socio-economic welfare** of the tribal community.
 - To act as a **facilitator and service provider** for the tribal community to **uplift production**.
 - **Provide training to enhance artistic skills** with modern technology to meet the requirements of the global market.
 - To increase the **promotion of tribal art and crafts** for a stable livelihood.
 - To **identify target groups to monitor and evaluate** the process and activities and **provide input to the Ministry**.
- **Retail Marketing:**
 - TRIFED has been **doing the retail marketing** of tribal products **under the brand name "TRIBES INDIA"**.
 - TRIFED promotes and creates a sustainable market through **retail outlets, exhibitions such as Aadishilp, Aadichitra, and OCTAVE**, international fairs, and e-marketing.
- TRIFED has also been **entrusted by the Government of India to implement** its proposed **Minimum Support Price Scheme for Minor Forest Produce**.
- **Head Office: New Delhi**
- It has a network of **pan India Regional Offices** and a **chain of TRIBES INDIA Retail Outlets**.

Source theprint: [The government declares TRIFED MD's suspension null and void](#) Polity & Governance

National Cooperative Exports Limited (NCEL): Govt routes sale of non-basmati white rice to 11 nations via NCEL

Why in News? Amid an export ban, the government has decided to route the sale of 12 lakh metric tonnes (LMT) of non-basmati white rice to 11 countries through National Cooperative Exports Limited (NCEL).

What's in Today's Article?

- What is National Cooperative Exports Limited (NCEL)?
- Significance of the NCEL
- News Summary Regarding Govt.'s Decision to Route Exports through NCEL

What is National Cooperative Exports Limited (NCEL)?

- **The Ministry of Cooperation**, Government of India, has set up a NCEL under Multi-State Cooperative Societies (MSCS) Act 2002.
- **It is an umbrella body** for cooperative sector exports and has an authorised share capital of Rs 2,000 crore, with Rs 500 crore as the initial paid-up share capital.

- It (NECL) covers **agriculture and allied activities as well as handloom and handicraft items** by enrolling a large number of co-operatives under its fold with a target to double its revenue by 2025 from the current Rs 2,160 crore.
- **All cooperative societies** from the level of primary to apex, who are interested in exports are eligible to become its **member**.
 - Its chief promoter is the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation Limited (GCMMF). The other promoters are: IFFCO, KRIBHCO, NAFED, and NCDC.
- **This society will focus on exporting the surpluses** available in the Indian cooperative sector by accessing wider markets beyond the geographical contours of the country.

Significance of the NCEL:

- **It will help in increasing the demand of Indian Cooperative products/services** across the globe and fetch best possible prices for such products/services.
- **It will promote exports** through various activities including -
 - Procurement, storage, processing, marketing, branding, labelling, packaging, certification, R&D, etc., and
 - Trading of all types of goods and services produced by cooperative societies.
- **The society will -**
 - **Help in arranging finance**, provide technical guidance,
 - Help in training and capacity building,
 - Develop and maintain market intelligence systems, and
 - Implement related government schemes which will increase exports from the cooperative sector.
 - Promote "Make in India" and led to 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'.
 - **Help in achieving the goal of "Sahakar-se-Samridhi"** through the inclusive growth model of Cooperatives.
- This society will also help cooperatives in getting **benefits of various export related schemes and policies** in a focussed manner through 'Whole of Government Approach'.

News Summary Regarding Govt.'s Decision to Route Exports through NCEL:

- **India's rice exports are broadly categorised into two categories - basmati and non-basmati.**
 - **The non-basmati category includes 6 subcategories** - rice in husk of seed quality; other rice in husk; husked (brown) rice; rice parboiled; non-basmati white rice; and broken rice.
 - From April to August this year, which includes the period of the export ban, India exported 19.74 lakh metric tonnes of non-basmati white rice, 9.6% lower than 21.86 LMT in the same period last year.
 - In the 2022-23 fiscal (April-June), India exported 177.86 LMT of non-basmati rice, of which 63.98 LMT was non-basmati white rice.
- Recently, the **Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT)** approved the export of 12.52 LMT through NCEL to UAE, Bhutan, Mauritius, Singapore, Nepal, Cameroon, Côte d' Ivoire, Republic of Guinea, Malaysia, Philippines and Seychelles.
- **Export will be allowed on the basis of permission granted** by the Government of India to other countries to meet their food security needs and based on the request of their government. **Economics**

India sends medical supplies, disaster relief aid to war-torn Gaza

Why in news?

- India sent its first humanitarian aid for the beleaguered residents of Gaza via Egypt.
- This was days after PM Modi spoke to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to convey condolences over the loss of civilian lives at the Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza City.

What's in today's article?

- India – Palestine Relation
- News Summary

India – Palestine Relation: Background:

- **Evolution of relationship**
 - India's support for the Palestinian cause is an integral part of the nation's foreign policy.
 - In 1974, India became the **first Non-Arab State** to recognize Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.
 - In 1988, India became one of the first countries to recognize the Palestinian State.
 - In 1996, India opened its Representative Office in Gaza, which was later shifted to Ramallah in 2003.
- **Support at multilateral fora**
 - India has always played a proactive role in garnering support for the Palestinian cause in multilateral fora.
 - India has consistently supported, co-sponsored, and voted in favour of UN General Assembly Resolutions:
 - securing the right to self-determination of Palestinians,
 - urging Israel's compliance with legal obligations, and
 - its status as a non-member State at the UN.
 - In 2011, India also voted in favour of Palestine becoming a full member of UNESCO.

Important Bilateral Visits and Political Interactions

- PM Modi paid a historic visit to Palestine in February 2018, the **first for an Indian Prime Minister**.
- Late President Yasser Arafat visited India several times. President Mahmoud Abbas visited India in 2005, 2008, 2010, 2012 and in May 2017 on his third State Visit.

Developmental Cooperation

- India has provided various forms of developmental cooperation assistance to Palestine over the years amounting to approximately US\$ 141 million.
- India has also provided a total of **US\$ 39 million of budgetary support** to the Palestinian Authority.
- In July 2021, India offered a Line of Credit worth USD 50 Million to Palestine for implementing developmental and sustainable projects.
- The major development assistance projects executed successfully by India include:
 - Palestine-India Techno-Park
 - Construction of Jawaharlal Nehru Library at Al Azhar University in Gaza city
 - The Mahatma Gandhi Library-cum-Student Activity Centre at the Palestine Technical College at Deir Al Balah in the Gaza Strip, etc.
- Currently, eight developmental projects are in progress, the details of some of which are as follows:
 - Palestinian Institute of Higher Diplomacy in Ramallah;
 - National Printing Press at Ramallah;

- Construction of Super-specialty hospital in Ramallah;
- Turathi - Women Empowerment Centres at Ramallah and Gaza; etc.

Quick Impact Projects (QIPs)

- In 2021-22 India implemented four Quick Impact Projects:
 - Rehabilitation of Yasser Arafat Square in Ramallah City,
 - Integration of Technology into Education with the Young Scientists Club (Al Muntada),
 - Establishing Beitunia Municipality Nursery, and
 - Construction of Aqraba Children Park.

Bilateral Trade

- Trade between India and Palestine is conducted through Israel and therefore, comprehensive trade statistics are not available.
- India-Palestine annual bilateral trade volume was USD 67.77 million for the year 2020.
 - Indian exports and imports were USD 67.17 million and USD 0.6 million, respectively.
 - India has a share of 0.06% of Palestine's exports, while India ranks 13th among the importing countries for Palestine with 1.1% share of total Palestine's imports.

Training and Capacity Building

- **ICCR Scholarships** - India provides 50 ICCR scholarships for Palestinian students annually for Graduate, Post-Graduate and Ph.D courses in India.
- **Indian Technical & Economic Co-operation (ITEC)** - 168 slots are offered to Palestine annually under the ITEC for training courses in India aimed at capacity building and skill enhancement.

IBSA Cooperation

- India, Brazil, South Africa (IBSA) Fund has also funded four projects in Palestine worth US\$ 5 mn approximately.

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)

- India supports Palestine and Palestinian refugees through its contributions to UNRWA.
- India is a member of its Advisory Commission since 2020. Since 2002, India has contributed a total of US\$ 36.5 million to UNRWA till 2022-23.

Culture Relations

- In 2014, a bust of Mahatma Gandhi was unveiled at the Garden of Nations in Ramallah.
- An Indian Cultural Week was also organized by the Mission, in association with ICCR and Palestinian Ministry of Culture in November 2021.

News Summary: India sends medical supplies, disaster relief aid to war-torn Gaza

- India sent humanitarian aid to the people of Palestine.
- An IAF C-17 flight carrying nearly 6.5 tonnes of medical aid and 32 tonnes of disaster relief material for the people of Palestine departed for El-Arish airport in Egypt.
- The material includes essential life-saving medicines, surgical items, tents, sleeping bags, tarpaulins, sanitary utilities, water purification tablets among other necessary items.

India in a balancing act

- In his first phone conversation with Palestinian President Abbas since the Hamas attack on Israel, PM Modi had reiterated India's long-standing principled position on the Israel-Palestine issue.
 - The phone call to Abbas was perceived as a balancing act.
- Modi's call to Abbas came days after he spoke to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to extend solidarity.
 - Following his conversation with Netanyahu, Modi had posted: "People of India stand in solidarity with Israel in this difficult hour... India strongly and unequivocally condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations".
- Later, Delhi, in its first official statement on the conflict, sought to balance its position.
- For Delhi, the diplomatic challenge was to balance between the many sides in West Asia where India has deep strategic ties with Israel on the one hand, and Saudi, UAE, Qatar, Iran and Egypt – to name a few – on the other hand International Relations

Sworn affidavit and an approver affidavit

Why in news?

- Darshan Hiranandani, CEO of the Hiranandani Group has given a "sworn affidavit" to the Ethics Committee of Lok Sabha.
- In his affidavit, he made a series of allegations against TMC MP Mahua Moitra and several other individuals.
- Moitra has rejected the contents of what she said was Hiranandani's approver affidavit on a white piece of paper with no letterhead.

What's in today's article?

- Sworn affidavit
- Approver affidavit

Sworn affidavit

- **About**
 - An affidavit is a sworn statement a person makes before a notary or officer of the court outside of the court asserting that certain facts are true to the best of that person's knowledge.
 - Section 3(3) of India's General Clauses Act, 1897, defines an affidavit as:
 - an affirmation and declaration in the case of persons by law allowed to affirm or declare instead of swearing.
- **Supreme Court and Sworn Affidavit**
 - In its 1977 ruling in Chhotan Prasad Singh vs. Hari Dusadh, a three-judge Bench of the Supreme Court said:
 - it is an essential characteristic of an affidavit that it should be made on oath or affirmation before a person having authority to administer the oath or affirmation.

Can anyone make an affidavit at any time?

- The Supreme Court in the Chhotan Prasad Singh case stated that according to the Oaths Act of 1969, any court or person authorized by law or by the agreement of the parties can administer oaths and affirmations.
- **However**, they can only do this when they are performing their legal duties or using their legal powers as outlined by the law.
- The court also observed that **only those magistrates** who were acting in the course of their duty could administer oaths and affirmations to the persons making the affidavits.

- Failure to meet this requirement would render the affidavits as "inadmissible" evidence.
- Affidavits are routinely made in the course of legal proceedings or trials.
- They can also be made for other purposes, such as registering one's property, or to declaring one's legal heir(s).

Approver affidavit

- In legal terms, an approver is a person who is directly or indirectly concerned, involved or privy to an offence.
- An accomplice or an accused in a case can later turn approver, siding with the prosecution in return for a lesser sentence or pardon.
- **Section 306** of the CrPC has provisions for tender of pardon for an accomplice in a crime on condition of his making a full and true disclosure of the whole of the circumstances of the offence within his knowledge relative to the offence.
- There is **no legal definition** of an "approver affidavit". Polity & Governance

Byjus

Category: SECURITY

1. Cyber Insurance for Cyber Crimes

Syllabus: Issues related to internal security through cyber risks Mains: Significance of cyber insurance in addressing cyber risks for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Context

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in India are increasingly vulnerable to cyberattacks, necessitating the adoption of cyber insurance.

Introduction

- Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a crucial role in India's economic landscape, contributing over 28% to the GDP and generating employment opportunities.
- However, they are increasingly vulnerable to cyberattacks, with India experiencing a high number of cyber incidents, including data breaches, malware attacks, and phishing attacks.

Challenges Faced by SMEs and MSMEs

- Limited resources: SMEs often have fewer resources to invest in cybersecurity and lack dedicated security teams.
- Increased susceptibility: Statistics show that about 43% of all cyberattacks are directed at small businesses and startups.
- Multi-pronged consequences: Cyber incidents result in financial losses, damage to reputation, and operational disruptions.

Importance of Cyber Insurance

- Cyber insurance is essential for SMEs and MSMEs to mitigate the financial and operational risks associated with cyberattacks.
- It provides financial protection, covering costs related to data breaches, ransomware attacks, and other cyber incidents.
- For cash-strapped SMEs, cyber insurance can mean the difference between survival and insolvency.

Tailored Cyber Insurance for SMEs

- Insurers now offer specialised cyber insurance solutions tailored to the unique needs and digital reliance of SMEs and MSMEs.
- These policies consider the scale of operations, specific cyber risks, and often come with provisions to address operational disruption caused by cyber incidents.

Coverage Offered by Cyber Insurance

- Notifying customers and affected parties about data breaches.
- Legal expenses arising from data breaches.
- Restoring lost or compromised data.
- Compensation for lost income during operational downtime caused by cyber events.
- Access to experts who guide businesses through managing and mitigating cyber incident impacts.

Intangible Costs Addressed by Cyber Insurance

- Reputation management provisions help businesses navigate the aftermath of cyberattacks and rebuild trust with stakeholders.
- Cyber insurance acknowledges the intangible costs related to customer trust, client exodus, revenue impact, and talent acquisition challenges.

Nut Graf: As SMEs and MSMEs contribute significantly to India's GDP, their vulnerability to cyberattacks poses a serious threat. Cyber insurance tailored to their needs is crucial to mitigate financial, operational, and reputational risks.

Category: INDIAN POLITY

1. The Court's 'no fundamental right to marry' is wrong

Syllabus: Indian Constitution—Historical Underpinnings, Evolution, Features, Amendments, Significant Provisions and Basic Structure.

Prelims- Supriyo v. Union of India case, Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 21, Right to Marry

Mains- Right to Marry, Transformative Constitution, Evolution of ambit of fundamental rights

Context

- The Supreme Court of India has ruled that there is no fundamental right to marriage, and therefore same-sex couples cannot marry.

Supriyo v. Union of India case

- While the court recognized the right of LGBTQ+ individuals to choose their partners and live together, it did not explicitly recognize same-sex marriage or civil unions.
- Existing legal provisions denied queer couples the right to adopt children. They argued that these provisions violated their fundamental rights to equality, non-discrimination, and life.
- The Supreme court has asked the executive to reconsider the laws on adoption in light of the best interests and welfare of children.
- The court also directed that same-sex couples must be protected from harassment, and gave instructions for the authorities to be sensitized to this issue.
- It directed the Union Government to set up a committee to examine whether and how the existing legal framework could be amended to make the benefits of marriage available to same-sex couples.

Historical Context

- **Impact of Section 377 on LGBTQ Individuals**
 - As a result of Section 377, LGBTQ+ individuals faced blackmail, torture, violence, and harassment from the police, their loved ones, and their families.
 - LGBTQ+ individuals were also afraid to reveal their sexual orientation due to fear of retribution.
- **Repeal of provisions under Section 377**
 - In 2009, the Delhi High Court repealed Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalized non-heterosexual relationships, but this was overturned by the Supreme Court in 2013 (Suresh Kumar Koushal v. Naz Foundation case), and then reinstated in 2018 (Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India)
 - The Lawyers Collective challenged the constitutionality of Section 377 in 2001, leading to the landmark cases of 2009 and 2018, which decriminalized consensual non-heterosexual relationships between adults in private.
 - The court also ruled that people have the right to self-identify their gender, leading to the passage of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, which allows for gender change and protects against discrimination.
 - However, neither case struck down Section 377 entirely.
- **Demand for Marriage Equality**
 - In India, individuals have the right to autonomy, dignity, privacy, and choice in partner selection.

- The Supreme Court has recognized the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals to have intimate relationships.
- After the Navtej Johar judgment, it is logical to assume that couples in such relationships may desire to develop long-term relationships, including marriage.
- Marriage offers various benefits, including succession, adoption, decision-making in hospitalization, employment benefits, and social legitimacy.
- LGBTQ+ communities face stigma due to lack of legal recognition of their relationships.
- As a result, LGBTQ+ communities demanded the right to marry and filed petitions in various courts, which were eventually transferred to the Supreme Court.
- The Supreme Court was tasked with deciding on the right of non-heterosexual couples to seek recognition of their marriages.

LGBTQ+ rights

- **International Recognition of the Right to Marry**
 - The Supreme Court's decision in Supriyo Chakraborty states that there is no fundamental right to marry in India.
 - This decision was reached despite India being a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which recognizes the right to marry as a human right.
- **Indian Constitution and Legislation**
 - The Indian Constitution and legislation are expected to align with the UDHR, and courts in India have previously interpreted the Constitution and statutes in line with the UDHR and other international covenants.
 - Article 16 of the UDHR provides that men and women have the right to marry and start a family, regardless of race, nationality, or religion.
 - Critics argue that the Indian Constitution does not explicitly provide for the right to marry, but this ignores the Indian constitutional jurisprudence, which has interpreted constitutional provisions in a liberal and expansive manner.
- **Evolution of rights under Article 21**
 - The Supreme Court has read the right to be treated with dignity into Article 21 of the Constitution, and has used the provisions of the UDHR to elaborate rights under the Constitution.
 - The Court has referenced the UDHR in previous cases, such as Prem Shankar Shukla and Francis Coralie Mullin, to support the idea that the right to protection against torture and degrading treatment is implicit in Article 21 of the Constitution.
 - In Maneka Gandhi, the Court relied on Article 10 of the UDHR to read in principles of natural justice into the administrative process.

Way Forward

- The Supreme Court's ruling currently identifies that marriage is only legal between a biological man and woman, despite the fact that gender identity is self-identified.
- The court's decision may perpetuate discrimination against same-sex couples and reduce them to second-class citizens.
- Extending marriage to queer couples or enabling them to enter into civil unions requires a comprehensive legal reform involving various stakeholders, including the queer community, religious leaders, government officials, and family law experts.

Nut Graf: The Supreme Court of India has ruled that there is no fundamental right to marriage, and therefore same-sex couples cannot marry. This decision is being considered a setback for LGBTQI rights in India, as it denies them the social, legal, and economic benefits of marriage. The court has directed the executive to reconsider the laws on adoption in light of the best interests and welfare of children, and has also asked the Union Government to set up a committee to examine whether and how the existing legal framework could be amended to make the benefits of marriage available to same-sex couples.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Restoring the ecological health of the Himalayas

Syllabus: Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.**Prelims-** Carrying Capacity, Government initiatives to preserve Indian Himalayan Region **Mains-** Sustainable Management of Indian Himalayan Region

Context: The Supreme Court of India has asked the Union government to suggest a way forward regarding the carrying capacity of the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) in light of the recent disasters in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim.

Carrying Capacity

- Carrying capacity refers to the maximum population size that an ecosystem or environment can sustainably support over a specific time period without causing significant degradation or harm to its natural resources and overall health.
- This is crucial to ensure long-term sustainability and balancing human activities with the preservation of natural ecosystems.

Union Government's Initiatives

- The Union government's affidavit recommends that the Director of the G.B. Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment should lead the assessment of carrying capacity.
- The affidavit proposes that the carrying capacity of all 13 Himalayan States and Union Territories should be determined.
- A technical support group consisting of representatives from various institutions such as the National Institute of Disaster Management, National Institute of Hydrology, National Environmental Engineering Research Institute, Wildlife Institute of India etc should be formed.
- The affidavit suggests that representatives of State disaster management authorities, the Geological Survey of India, Survey of India, and member secretaries or nominees of the Central Pollution Control Board and Central Ground Water Board should also be included in the committee.
- The government has requested the Court to direct the Himalayan States/UTs to set up a committee headed by the Chief Secretary of the respective State, with members chosen by the Chief Secretary as deemed appropriate.
- The Indian government has launched various initiatives related to overall development in the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR), including:
 - National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem
 - Indian Himalayas Climate Adaptation Programme
 - Secure Himalaya Project
 - Guidelines on 'Carrying Capacity in the IHR'
 - The Ministry of Environment and Forests reminded all states to submit an action plan (carrying capacity) if they had not already done so.

Challenges:

- Despite the January 2020 guidelines, little progress has been made in preparing action plans for carrying capacity in states.
- Critics point out that incomplete recommendations by the ministry and involvement of those responsible for mountain destruction in drafting the plan of action as the major reasons for the delay.
- Not assessing the overall sustainable capacity of the state's environment, including all biological species, food, habitat, water, ecology, and agriculture has been a key challenge.
- Concerned citizen's warnings about construction projects have been ignored, resulting in negative consequences and lack of citizen participation.

Conclusion:

- The focus should be on sustainable development that covers the broader dimensions of carrying capacity and involves people-centric processes.
- Measuring the carrying capacity of only towns and cities is insufficient; the entire region should be considered.
- Expert committees should prioritize social aspects of population sustainability and include adequate citizen representation.
- Each panchayat samiti and municipality should be encouraged to present recommendations based on established population sustainability criteria.

Nut Graf: The Supreme Court of India has asked the Union government to suggest a way forward regarding the carrying capacity of the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) in light of the recent disasters. The government has proposed a committee to assess the carrying capacity of all 13 Himalayan states and union territories. The focus should be on sustainable development that covers the broader dimensions of carrying capacity and involves people-centric processes.

1. EU calls for Global Minimum Tax on billionaires

Syllabus: GS 2- Economy Prelims: Global Minimum Tax

Introduction

- The European Union Tax Observatory's 'Global Tax Evasion Report 2024' highlights tax evasion by billionaires, enabling them to effectively pay tax rates as low as 0% to 0.5% of their wealth.

- The report calls for a global minimum tax on billionaires, set at 2% of their wealth, to combat evasion and generate an estimated \$250 billion from fewer than 3,000 individuals.

Justification for the Proposed Tax The report justifies the 2% tax rate for billionaires as "modest" considering their wealth has grown at an average of 7% annually since 1995, net of inflation.

Successes in Curbing Tax Evasion

- The report recognizes the effectiveness of the automatic sharing of bank information in decreasing offshore tax evasion by a factor of three in the last decade.
- It notes that there is still a significant amount of financial wealth held offshore, but only 25% of it evades taxation today.

Challenges in Curbing Tax Evasion

- The report identifies two main challenges for offshore tax evasion:
 - Some offshore financial institutions do not comply with automatic exchange of bank information requirements.
 - Wealthy individuals have started shifting their assets to non-covered asset classes, particularly real estate.

Recommendations for Expanding Measures

- The report calls for an expansion of assets covered by the automatic exchange of information system to further reduce tax evasion.

Global Minimum Tax Concerns

- The global minimum tax of 15% on multinational corporations (MNCs) adopted in 2012 has faced challenges, as growing loopholes reduce expected revenues.
- The report mentions the trend of "greenwashing" the global minimum tax, where MNCs can use 'green' tax credits for low carbon transition to lower their tax rates below 15%.

Concerns About Tax Competition

- The report highlights emerging forms of aggressive tax competition targeting wealthy foreign individuals, with such regimes offering tax exemptions or reductions to incoming residents.
- These preferential tax regimes weaken overall tax collection and have negative spillover effects on other countries.

1. Second Thomas Shoal

Introduction

- Recent collisions have occurred between Chinese vessels and Philippine boats near Second Thomas Shoal in the disputed South China Sea.
- Both nations have blamed each other for the incidents, adding to longstanding tensions in the region.

First Collision – China Coast Guard and Indigenous Resupply Boat

- The Philippine government task force attributes the first collision to the "dangerous blocking manoeuvres of China Coast Guard vessel 5203."
- China claims the collision occurred because the resupply boat ignored warnings and passed through law enforcement unprofessionally and dangerously.

Second Collision – Philippine Coast Guard and Chinese Maritime Militia Vessel

- The second collision involved a Philippine Coast Guard vessel and a "Chinese Maritime Militia vessel."
- The Philippine task force says the Philippine boat was "bumped" by the Chinese vessel, while China alleges that the Philippine boat deliberately reversed into a Chinese fishing vessel.

Background

- China claims almost the entire South China Sea, a region crucial for global trade, despite an international ruling against its claims.
- Second Thomas Shoal is located near the Spratly Islands, a hotly contested area, with its ownership contested by several nations.

- This situation contributes to the ongoing tensions in the South China Sea, which has been a contentious region due to conflicting territorial claims and frequent incidents involving neighbouring countries and China.

2. Canada's actions are in violation of Vienna Convention, says Jaishankar

Introduction

- Canada's recent withdrawal of 41 diplomats from India and the suspension of walk-in services at Canadian consulates in India have raised diplomatic tensions.
- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar expressed concerns about the safety and security of Indian diplomats in Canada, asserting that it challenges the "most fundamental aspect" of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

Background

- Canada accused India of violating the Vienna Convention after the withdrawal of its diplomats.
- Indian missions in Canada had suspended visa issuance in September, citing security concerns for diplomats.

Key Points

- S. Jaishankar emphasised that ensuring the safety and security of diplomats is a fundamental aspect of the Vienna Convention.
- He expressed hope that the situation would improve, enabling the resumption of visa services for Canadians in India.
- India is reportedly reviewing the security situation that led to the suspension of visa services.

International Responses

- The United Kingdom and the United States supported Canada's position, expressing concerns that the move by India impacted the principles of the Vienna Convention.
- The U.S. State Department emphasised the importance of resolving differences between the countries through diplomats on the ground in India.

3. India sends aid to Gaza

Introduction

- India has joined the list of countries providing humanitarian assistance to the civilian population in the Gaza Strip.
- The relief material was delivered to the Egyptian Red Crescent at the El-Arish airbase near the Gaza border.

Nature of Aid

- An Indian Air Force (IAF) C-17 flight carried approximately 6.5 tonnes of medical aid and 32 tonnes of disaster relief material.
- The assistance comprises crucial supplies such as medications to save lives, surgical equipment, sleeping materials, sanitation utilities, tents, water purification tablets, protective tarpaulins and various other essential items.

Appreciation from Palestine Ambassador

- Ambassador of Palestine, Adnan Abu Alhaja, expressed his gratitude for India's assistance.
- He highlighted that the Israeli blockade of the past two weeks had halted the entry of essential items such as oxygen into the Gaza Strip.
- The Palestinian people highly appreciate India's timely and unsolicited assistance.

Transfer of Supplies

- The Indian consignment landed in Egypt, where Ambassador Ajit V. Gupte handed over the supplies to the Egyptian Red Crescent.
- The Egyptian Red Crescent is responsible for forwarding the aid to Palestine through the border crossing between Gaza and Egypt.

Support for Two-State Solution

- India has consistently expressed its support for a two-state solution to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict.
- The recent aid delivery underscores India's commitment to providing humanitarian assistance and contributing to peaceful resolution efforts.

Rau's

Siachen Glacier

UPSC Syllabus: Prelims Sub Theme: Geography | UPSC

Context: An Agniveer from Maharashtra died at Siachen Glacier after complaining of uneasiness.



Keys facts about Siachen Glacier:

- It is a piedmont glacier (glaciers located at the foot, or base, of mountains) in eastern Karakoram range.
- It is 75 km (47 miles) long, which makes it the **second longest nonpolar glacier** in the world, after **Fedchenko Glacier** in Tajikistan.
- It **originates** at the base of the **Indira Col West**, a col (low point) on the Indira Ridge.
- The glacier lies between the **Saltoro Ridge** immediately to the west and the main Karakoram range to the east.
- It is located at the point **NJ9842** where the **Line of Control** between India and Pakistan ends.
- **NJ9842, also called NJ 980420** is the **northernmost demarcated** point of the India-Pakistan Line of Control (LoC).
- It is the highest militarized zone in the world.
- **Operation Meghdoot 1984**, a military operation, gave India control over all of the Siachen Glacier, including its tributaries.

Practice MCQ:

Q. With reference to Siachen Glacier, consider the following statements:

1. It is a rock glacier situated in Pir Panjal range.
2. It is the longest nonpolar glacier in the world.
3. Operation Polo gave the control over all of the Siachen Glacier to India.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) Only one (b) Only two (c) All three (d) None

Ans. (d)

Factory fishing in Antarctica for krill targets the cornerstone of a fragile ecosystem.

2. UPSC Current Affairs: Antarctic krill

UPSC Syllabus: Prelims Sub Theme: Environment | UPSC

Context: **Antarctic krill** (*Euphausia superba*) **fishing is banned in U.S.** waters due to concerns it could impact whales, seals and other animals that feed on the shrimp-like creatures, it's been taking place for decades in Antarctica, where krill are most abundant.



About Antarctic Krill:

- It is estimated that there are over 700 trillion adult individuals of these **shrimp-like crustaceans** in the Southern Ocean.
- Adult krill can live anywhere in the Southern Ocean – from the very surface layer to the seafloor, and from inshore areas to the deep open ocean.
- Antarctic krill grow up to **6cm in length and can weigh 1 gram**.
- Antarctic krill (and other krill species) are **bioluminescent**, meaning they produce light.
- Antarctic krill are a **key species**, supporting populations of penguins, seals, whales, and other marine life.
- Antarctic krill feed on phytoplankton (single celled marine plants), which absorb carbon dioxide. Krill then **egests this carbon** through their faecal pellets and by shedding their exoskeletons, which **then both sink to the sea floor** where some of the **carbon gets stored** away.
- It is one of the most common species in its range and it is not at risk of endangerment or extinction.it has a **least concern status by IUCN**.

Practice question:

With reference to **Antarctic Krill**, consider the following statement:

- 1.It is primary producers in marine food chain.
- 2.It helps in sequestering carbon thereby curbing climate change.
- 3.It is critically endangered species.

How many of the above statement are **Incorrect**?

- (a) Only one (b) Only two (c) All three (d) None

Answer-(b)

Explanation

Both statement 1 and 3 are **incorrect**.

- **Statement 1 is incorrect**-It is **primary consumers** feed on phytoplankton.
- **Statement 2 is correct**- Antarctic krill feed on phytoplankton (single celled marine plants), which absorb carbon dioxide. Krill then **egests this carbon** through their faecal pellets and by shedding their exoskeletons, which **then both sink to the sea floor** where some of the **carbon gets stored** away.
- **Statement 3 is incorrect**- It is one of the most common species in its range and it is not at risk of endangerment or extinction.it has a **least concern status by IUCN**. However, they are facing challenges from anthropogenic activities like Krill fishing and Climate Change.

Sensitive ecosystem in Cauvery's birthplace cries for attention amid deficit rainfall

Cauvery river

UPSC Syllabus: Prelims Sub Theme: Geography I UPSC

Context: -The dwindling storage in Karnataka's Cauvery basin reservoir owing to drought prevailing in the state has caused concern in the downstream areas, besides typically escalating the legal tussle over interstate sharing of the river water.

About Kodagu sensitive ecosystem and shunning of Paddy cultivation

- It is a tiny hilly district located in the pristine Western Ghats region.
- Kodagu district has reported a cumulative rainfall deficit of 42% during southwest monsoon.

Reasons for reducing paddy cultivation in Kodagu district.

- According to farmers, paddy cultivation is not remunerative.
- High labor cost.
- Man-animal conflict in Nagara-hole national park.
- Rapid commercialization which is making farmers to either sell off or take up construction activities on paddy cultivation.
- According to member of **Coffee board of India**, rapid commercialization hampering the Kodagu ecosystem negatively.

KAVERI RIVER SYSTEM

- The Kaveri River rises at **Talakaveri** in the **Brahmagiri range** in the Western Ghats, **Kodagu district** of the state of Karnataka.
- **Basin states:** Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, and Union Territory of Puducherry draining an area of 81,155 Sq.km
- It is bounded by Western Ghats on west, by Eastern Ghats on east and south and by ridges separating it from Krishna basin and Pennar basin on the north.
- Shivsamudram (in Karnataka) & Hogenakkal (in Tamil Nadu) waterfalls are most important on this river.
- Shivsamudram waterfall has twin waterfalls: (i) Gaganachukki (ii) Bharachukki.

Left bank tributary	Right bank tributary
Herangi	Laxmanatirtha
Hemavati	Kabini

Shimsha	Suvarnavati
Akravati	Bhavani (2nd longest of Tamil Nadu)
	Amravati
	Noyil

There are mainly 7 distributaries from the river Cauvery in delta region that contribute the flow for the Karaikal area which are as follows:

1. Nandalar
2. Nattar
3. Vanjiyar
4. Noolar
5. Arasalar
6. Thirumalairajanar
7. Puravadaianar

2. Consider the following rivers:

- 1.Barak
- 2.Lohit
- 3.Subansiri

Which of the above flows/flow through Arunachal Pradesh?

- A 1 only B 2 and 3 only C 1 and 3 only D 1, 2 and 3

Answer B

Explanation- The Barak River flows 900 kilometres (560 mi) through the states of Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Assam in India and into the Bay of Bengal via Bangladesh.

Practice question

With reference to Cauvery River system, consider the following statement?

1. The Cauvery basin spread in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Puducherry.
2. Cauvery flow west to east following rift valley.
3. Papikonda and Nagarhole national park are in Cauvery basin.

How many of the above statement are correct?

- A) Only One
B) Only two
C) All three
D) None

Answer- A only one

Explanation:

Answer-Statement 1 is correct.

Statement 2 is incorrect: follow slope orientation- originate at an elevation of 1,341 m above mean sea level and flows for about 800 km before its outfall into the Bay of Bengal.

Statement 3 is incorrect- Papikonda lies in Andhra Pradesh, Godavari River flows through it.

Nagarhole NP is in Cauvery basin.

Forex swap auction

UPSC Syllabus: Prelims Sub Theme: Monetary Policy I UPSC

Forex Buy/sell Swap Auction

Dollar-Rupee sell/buy swap auction

- It is a forex management tool under which the Central Bank (RBI) uses its currency to sell another currency to other banks and then buy the same bank at a later date.
- Thus, under the Dollar-Rupee sell/buy swap, India's RBI sold \$5 billion dollars to Indian banks in exchange of rupees and immediately enters an agreement with dollar buying banks promising to buy dollars at a later date (October 23, 2023).

Impact of this move:

The issuance of Forex sell/buy swap reduced the availability of rupee in the Indian markets and reduced inflationary pressures in the Indian economy. This helps to control inflation without increasing the repo rate, which hurts the businesses.

The issuance of Forex buy/sell swap also strengthened the demand of the rupee vis-a-vis the dollars.

Practice Question:

Q.1) Consider the following statements about Dollar-Rupee sell/buy swap auction:

1. Under this RBI, first buys dollars from banks and then sells these dollars to the banks on predetermined dates.
2. Issuance of these bonds can boost inflation in the economy.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: (d)

Mains Articles

ecological health of the Himalayas

UPSC Syllabus: Mains Sub Theme: Changes in critical geographical features | UPSC

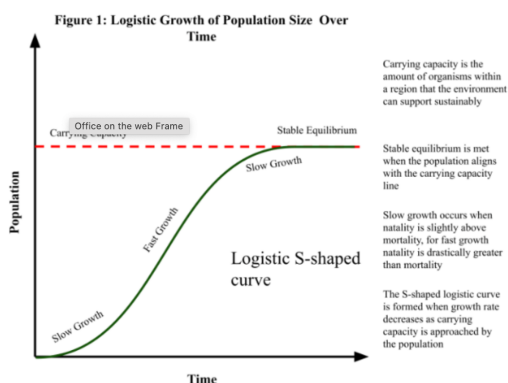
Restoring the ecological health of the Himalayas

Context - The environmental devastation caused in the Himalayan States of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Sikkim has reinvigorated the debate on the “carrying capacity” of the regions. The Supreme Court of India, in response to a petition filed by a retired

Indian Police Service officer, has asked the Union government to suggest a way forward regarding the carrying capacity of the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR), which includes its towns and cities. The Union government’s affidavit (filed by the Ministry of Environment) states that the Director of the G.B. Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment should be the lead in assessing carrying capacity and that the carrying capacity of all 13 Himalayan States and Union Territories (UT) should be determined. The affidavit adds that there can be a technical support

What is the concept of “carrying capacity”?

- Carrying capacity of a biological species in a particular habitat refers to the maximum number of individuals (of that species) that the environment can carry and sustain, considering its geography or physical features.
- The physical features present in the environment act as limiting factors (e.g. food, water, competition, etc.). Thus, the population limit can be expected to depend on these factors.
- In essence, food availability is an important variable as it affects the population size of the species.
- It does so in such a way that if food demand is not met over a given period of time the population size will eventually decrease until the resources become adequate.
- By contrast, when food supply exceeds demand then the population size will soon increase and will stop increasing when the source is consequently depleted.



- A population may grow at a faster rate and follow a J-shaped curve. When the birth rate surpasses the death rate of the species, this results in

exponential growth. However, this trend soon changes as resources become limited. The growth rate slows down.

- Soon, it reaches a stable equilibrium where biomass in the given area seems unchanged over a certain period of time. At this point, the death rate appears to be compensated by the birth rate within a population. This means the per capita birth rate equals the per capita death rate.
- By contrast, when deaths appear to outgrow births, this indicates that the carrying capacity has been exceeded. This is a case of overshoot. The population may go below the carrying capacity. This can occur, for instance, during disease and parasitic outbreaks.

Factors affecting the carrying capacity of an ecosystem:

- Food and water supply
- Habitat space,
- Competition (intraspecific and interspecific),
- Physical factors (e.g. extreme heat, drought, etc.),
- Chemical factors (e.g. pH, mineral deficiency, etc.)
- Anthropogenic factors.

Note - The sum of these factors that end up restricting the biotic potential of a species is referred to as environmental resistance.

Why Himalayan ecosystem is unique?

- These systems, with their steep slopes and sharp gradients, are heterogeneous and exhibit sharp and most often systemic changes in climatic variables over very short distances.
- These features consequently result into enhanced changes in hydrological processes, with accelerated direct runoff and erosion.
- Major rivers of the region have their origin from these mountains and are the source of water for a large proportion of the human population within and outside the mountain region.
- Many of the world’s crops originate in mountains, a crucial resource that should be conserved for sustaining modern agriculture.
- Natural wealth in the region, including geological assets, forms an important part of the Himalayan eco-system.
- All this has contributed to a whole range of diversity in indigenous human habitations, cultures and knowledge systems. The region is largely inhabited by indigenous societies.

Therefore, sustaining biodiversity in the region also means protecting the interests of the people. The region serves as a rich repository of plant and animal wealth in diverse ecological systems. These ecosystems reflect a mosaic of biotic communities at various spatial and organizational levels. Recognition of the Himalaya as one among 34 global biodiversity hotspots aptly reflects its’ wide ranging ecological significance. The vulnerability of the biological and physical features of the Himalayan Ecosystem towards natural and human induced disturbances is well recognized. Immediate actions are required to ensure sustenance of the ecosystem.

Infrastructure effect on Himalayan region:

Infrastructure like dams, roads, hotels, industries etc are increasing the vulnerability of the Himalayan ecosystem in multiple ways. Joshimath crisis is one such example. Following are the various impacts:

- **Slope destabilization** - Large scale construction of roads, hotels, powerhouses etc. involves blasting, quarrying, deforestation and muck disposal which loosens slopes and destabilizes them.
- **Floods** - Altered river flows reduce flood absorption, risks flash floods downstream (Uttarakhand disaster, 2013).
- **Landslides** - By disrupting underground streams and aquifers, tunnels can weaken slope stability leading to landslides (Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh 2022)
- **Earthquakes** - Huge pressure is exerted by the large structures of the dams which in turn create fractures and faults in the rocks below generating earthquakes. For e.g - Koyna dam.
- **Erosion and desertification** - Siltation in dams devoid the rivers of natural sediments. Soil downstream does not get enough nutrients and thus issues of soil erosion, desertification etc rises.
- **Forced displacement** - This destroys livelihood sources of indigenous communities further increasing their vulnerabilities.

How Climate Change is impacting Himalayas?

- Variability in the volumetric flow of water in the rivers
- Loss in biodiversity
- Unsustainable changes in ecology
- Glacier recession
- Deforestation and degradation
- Conditions for impending natural disasters
- Dislocation of traditional societies dependent on the Himalayan ecosystem.

Proposed actions under National Mission for Sustaining Himalayan Ecosystem:

- Continuous Monitoring of the Eco-system and Data Generation
- Promoting research especially in Glacial areas
- Ecological modelling and predicting climate change scenarios
- Vulnerability assessment
- Promoting sustainable forestry, sustainable agriculture and food security
- Promoting regional cooperation involving domestic states as well as neighbouring countries.

- Sustainable urbanization by waste management, traffic control, town planning and regulating tourism.
- Building environmental awareness among the citizens.

Topic 2: Tax Evasion: Base erosion and Profit Shifting

GS-3 Economy

Tax evasion (BEPS) UPSC Syllabus: Mains Sub Theme: Taxation I UPSC

